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ABSTRACT

The lead article of this issue, "Taking the Lead: The Role of the Principal in School Reform" (Kathleen Trial), discusses the various roles of the principal: psychologist, teacher, facilities manager, philosopher, police officer, diplomat, social worker, mentor, PR director, coach, and cheerleader. A second article discusses making shared leadership work; several principals from a five-state region offer their perspectives on what it takes to encourage shared leadership within a school community as part of their efforts to implement reform. The issue also includes resources on shared leadership and "Mean Comparisons for Regional Analysis of CSRD Early Implementation Survey." (Contains 13 references.) (DFR)

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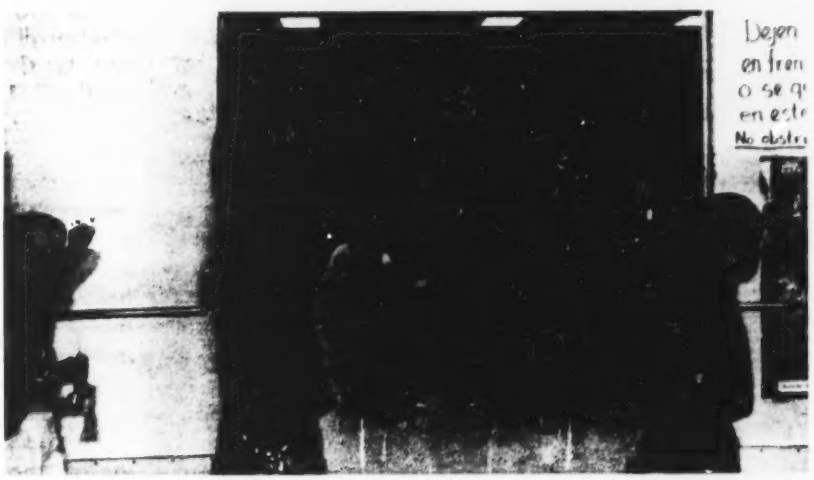
SEDL + STUDENT SUCCESS

Taking the Lead: The Role of the Principal in School Reform



By Kathleen Trail

As principal of Houston Elementary, Sarah Nelson's presence is felt in the hallways and classrooms of the school. She has a strong rapport with her students and teachers.

Research tells us that principals are the linchpins in the enormously complex workings, both physical and human, of a school. The job calls for a staggering range of roles: psychologist, teacher, facilities manager, philosopher, police officer, diplomat, social worker, mentor, PR director, coach, cheerleader. The principalship is both lowly and lofty. In one morning, you might deal with a broken window and a broken home. A bruised knee and a bruised ego. A rusty pipe and a rusty teacher.

— Dee Sherman (in *The New Principal: NW Education*, Spring 2000)

The job of a principal can indeed be staggering in its demands, particularly in the context of school reform. The picture that Sherman paints of the "new" principal is a far cry from the traditional administrator of decades past. The job has evolved significantly over the last twenty years, and today's principal is constantly multi-tasking and shifting roles at a moment's notice. Barbara Trousdale, principal of Ysleta Middle School in El Paso, Texas, thrives on the many demands of her job. "The daily challenge of handling multiple tasks is what I love *most* about being a principal. Each day provides new experiences and opportunities to be truly creative in solving problems. It allows me opportunities to involve others in problem solving, to model the very behaviors which I hope they'll repeat with students and colleagues. It is *teaching* at its best—yes, principals are teachers too!" Focusing on the many roles of the principalship highlights some basic characteristics of effective principals that are especially important for leading a school in the process of implementing a reform program.

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Taking the Lead. *continued from page 1*

The principal as psychologist.

In today's schools, effective principals are accessible to every student and teacher, acting as a sounding board for both ideas and emotions. In contrast with the stereotypical principal of past generations who was a stern disciplinarian, principals today are more often than not providing support and praise or guiding staff through the inevitable bumps and bruises that come with implementing change in a school. By truly *listening* to what teachers and students are saying, a principal can continuously take stock of the school culture and use feedback to make reform efforts more effective.

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The principal as teacher.

From their own teaching experiences, principals can have valuable insight into the challenges teachers face in the classroom. But they must also position themselves as guides and as models for teachers who, in the face of significant change, have to become learners themselves. Knowledge about research supporting a school's reform model, an understanding of data utilization, and continuous, intensive professional development are all crucial in establishing the knowledge base necessary to support reform. In *A New Vision for Staff Development* (Sparks and Hirsh, 1997), elementary school principal Rosie O'Brian Votjek talks about leading a change-focused school: "I served as a facilitator, consultant, instructor, and colleague who assisted teachers in integrating curriculum and using new instructional practices. . . . I promoted different kinds of staff development, but the most important thing I did was 'walk the talk.'"

The principal as facilities manager.

Although it is not the most glamorous aspect of the job, a principal's role in overseeing the physical structures of the school is key. Kathy Anderson, principal of Tom Elementary in Haworth, Oklahoma, laughs, "I frequently find myself doing custodial work. Whatever it takes to keep the school running." A functional school is not enough, though. Researchers have discovered that the physical condition of a school can make a difference in student achievement (Council for Educational Development and Research, 1997). The physical aspects of a school need to reflect the vision for reform: examples of students' work displayed on the walls, clean, bright spaces that exhibit pride in the schools' appearance, classrooms that allow for flexibility in different seating arrangements, and adequate resources for both students and teachers.

The principal as philosopher.

A philosopher is often thought of as having his "head in the clouds." But a principal's lofty perspective is as necessary to the life of a school as his practicality. Frequently, as Thomas Sergiovanni (1984) observes, "The principal is... the one who seeks to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its identity." In helping to shape the vision, a principal must work to include all of the stakeholders throughout the entire change process. This inclusion helps ensure not only the buy-in of the stakeholders, but also an increased sense of empowerment and greater potential for long-term sustainability of the school's reform efforts.

The principal as police officer.

This role shouldn't be seen as a mandate for a principal to *enforce* rules. Rather, principals work to create a safe school environment, to make their presence known by "walking their beats," and to "keep the peace" through conflict-resolution and mediation. A principal's skill in promoting healthy, productive interactions among the staff is valuable, particularly in making sure that both negative and positive feedback is heard and considered, effectively giving teachers "power" to participate in decisionmaking and enact change in the school.

The principal as diplomat.

The standards for school leaders developed in 1998 by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) include two areas that relate to a principal's role as diplomat: "skills in school governance and collaborative policy formation that demonstrate an understanding of the larger... context" and "effective communication and community relations skills." Acting as a liaison with the various stakeholders throughout the implementation of a reform program, a principal's diplomacy often comes into play. Interaction with district personnel and superintendents is crucial in helping to ensure that policies and resources are in place so the school's internal change climate can flourish.

The principal as social worker.

Many see a social worker's job as helping children who come from troubled homes or who have other problems. Seen in a broader context, the role of a principal as social worker can encompass work in fostering collaboration with families and other community groups to support students. Another part of the principal's role as social worker is to establish a safe and comfortable environment, one in which students can grow academically and emotionally, but also where teachers and staff can take risks and stretch professionally within the context of school change.

The principal as mentor.

As a mentor, a principal shares professional knowledge with teachers, but also, according to Liz Melson, a principal at Jefferson High School in San Antonio, "models 'expected behavior' for teachers; communicates a willingness to be open, nonjudgmental, yet focused; creates a vision and confidence that there are no insurmountable obstacles to dreams, wishes, and potentials; and advocates for their rights and needs." In *Issues ... about Change* (SEDL, 1999, v7.2), the value of a nurturing relationship between principal and teacher is explored: "One teacher explained, 'The principal strongly encourages the teacher to identify and try new things that they feel might be beneficial to the students. When she does this, the teachers feel no threat of failing, for the principal gives them full support under any conditions.'" The role of mentor is particularly important for principals to take on in the process of implementing change, not only because of their instructional experience, but also because they can see the big picture. They are aware of the culture of the school and the issues facing other teachers, particularly those challenges related to reform.

The principal as PR director.

More and more principals are spending significant chunks of their time working in a public relations capacity to ensure commitment from the parents and community alike. As language from the corporate sector filters into the world of education, references to parents and community members as stakeholders and students as clients are becoming more commonplace. This language emphasizes a renewed focus on the learning outcomes for the student. For reform to work, there must be broad-based support for the school's improvement efforts, and that support will evolve as stakeholders learn about the program and what is happening at the school. Trousdale, who has had significant success in implementing the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence reform model, feels that her role of providing PR for the school is a primary function of her position. "It does no good to do great things and keep it to yourself. I welcome every opportunity to open doors to visitors, and I share the story of our success whenever I can."

The principal as coach.

Coaches do much more than simply teach team players the requisite skills. They set goals for the team and inspire them to reach those goals. They give team members the knowledge and drive to practice and improve their skills on their own. They make sure the team is working together effectively toward a common objective. They strategize, identifying areas for improvement by looking at the team's past performance. In much the same way, a principal creates a vision, sets goals, builds a strong team of teachers, encourages skill building and continuous learning, assesses performance by looking at data, and provides inspiration.

The principal as cheerleader.

One of Melson's mantras is, "Praise, praise, praise." As in any workplace, recognition of the staff's accomplishments promotes an effective work environment. SEDL's *Voices from the Field: Success in School Reform* (2000) discusses the importance of celebration throughout implementation process. "As implementation progresses, it is important for principals to acknowledge teacher success with celebrations and commendations. Forums such as faculty meetings, PTA meetings, school newsletters, and school board meetings all make excellent places to share good news about teacher success."

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June Reed, principal of Cochiti Elementary School and Middle School, provides support and encouragement for students and teachers alike. Cochiti is located in northern New Mexico.

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Taking the Lead, *continued from page 3*

Sharing the Lead and Sharing the Load

You're probably thinking to yourself at this point, "It's too much. How can any one person possibly be *all* those things?" Well, the good news is that one important role was left out of Sherman's description—the principal as *collaborator*. There are many benefits of sharing the responsibility and the rewards of leadership with teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members.

The most immediate benefit of leadership as a collaborative effort is that principals not only share the lead, but share the load.

The most immediate benefit of leadership as a collaborative effort is that principals not only share the lead, but share the load. However, collaboration of this nature is not merely delegation. C. Cryss Brunner (1999) discusses collaboration versus delegation in a list of tips developed for superintendents. The concept can apply to all leaders, though. In the collaboration process, principals "do not turn decisions over to individuals or groups. Instead, they remain active in the decisionmaking process, giving themselves one vote when the decision is made." While it can be difficult to trust in the decisionmaking ability of others and to give up some of the power of the position, there is also a kind of freedom in the process. The weight of important decisions is carried more easily by many shoulders.

Another reason that shared leadership is critical lies in its potential for engaging stakeholders, especially teachers, more fully in the reform process. Linda Lambert (1998) explains: "When we equate the powerful concept of leadership with the behaviors of one person, we are limiting the achievement of a broad-based participation by a community or a society. School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of a community."

Today's principal must constantly shift gears. Here, principal Sarah Nelson takes a moment to help one of her students with his classwork.

Lastly, when shared leadership is "embedded in the school community as a whole," there is a much greater potential for long-term sustainability of reform. By taking a collective responsibility for leadership, the school's staff can help prevent a collapse of the reform program in the face of shifting personnel, even through a change of principal. The strength that comes from this kind of collaboration is much like the strength of fabric woven from many different threads. Individually, those threads are easily broken, but as an integrated whole, the cloth is strong and not likely to unravel from the loss of one thread.

The sometimes overwhelming demands of being a principal make the strength that comes from shared leadership a vital resource. And in facing the demands that go along with implementing school reform, strength may be the most important characteristic for a principal to have.

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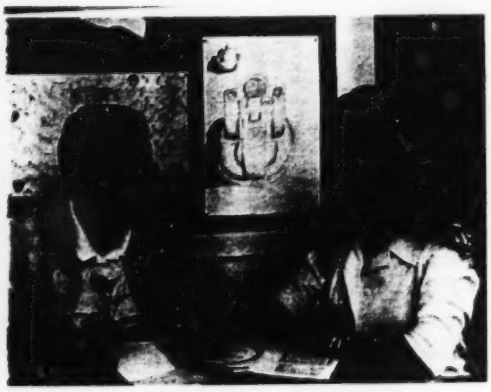
Making Shared Leadership Work

In this article, several principals from SEDL's five-state region offer their perspectives on what it takes to encourage shared leadership within a school community. Kathy Anderson (Tom Elementary/Tom ISD—Haworth, Oklahoma); Liz Melson (Jefferson High School—San Antonio, Texas); Jackie Morgan (Lee Elementary—El Paso, Texas); and Barbara Trousdale (Ysleta Middle School—El Paso, Texas) each offer practical insights based on their experiences in building shared leadership as part of their efforts to implement reform.



Principal Liz Melson (left) consults with a student at Jefferson High School in San Antonio, Texas.

Imagine a school where teachers, staff, administrators, parents, students, and community members all work together to make the school a better place. Teachers mentor each other, freely comparing and sharing instructional ideas. The principal listens to the concerns of everyone affected by an issue and works with them to develop a thoughtful solution. Parents actively support and seek to educate themselves about the school's reform program. Students act as community ambassadors, accompanying the principal to meetings to show off newly acquired technology skills to various community groups.

Although this "imaginary" school may sound idyllic, each of these examples was taken from the day-to-day experiences of the five principals interviewed for this article. Because each situation is unique, shared leadership will *look* different in different school communities. But these principals have found ways to tap into the leadership capacity of teachers, parents, students, and community members and have reaped the rewards.

Shared leadership is where much of the true work of building a school's vision happens. In the process of becoming what Thomas Sergiovanni (1984) refers to as a "community of leaders," teachers, administrators, parents, students, and others become collectively responsible for envisioning and implementing school reform. Liz Melson, a principal at Jefferson High School in San Antonio, recognizes both the value and challenge involved in sharing leadership: "It is the *key* to building the capacity of the group to implement change. But it takes a lot of effort and work to be successful at true collaboration." Below are some guidelines and suggestions for initiating and developing a "community of leaders" within your school.

How can a principal encourage shared leadership?

The principal typically takes a particularly strong leadership role when initiating shared leadership within a school. Although implementing shared leadership takes effort and planning, spending time *discussing* how to accomplish this goal may not make much sense to busy teachers. Frequently, it is more effective to let teachers see the value of sharing leadership firsthand by identifying an issue or a problem and using a collaborative approach to solve it. As the group becomes comfortable with the logistics of sharing leadership, the principal often moves out of the supervisory role and into the role of colleague, while still facilitating dialogue, supporting the group, synthesizing information, and continually focusing the group on the school's vision.

Liz Melson, a principal at Jefferson High School in San Antonio, recognizes both the value and challenge involved in sharing leadership: "It is the key to building the capacity of the group to implement change. But it takes a lot of effort and work to be successful at true collaboration."

As principal of Tom Elementary in Oklahoma, Kathy Anderson comments, "I really do think that a principal's role changes depending on the number of people you're dealing with, the experience and background of the teachers, and the setting in which you're talking with them. Our school is very small, so quite often I do talk with teachers as their colleague. But if you have teachers without much experience in a certain area, a lot of the times, you'll act more as their supervisor."

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Making Shared Leadership Work,
continued from page 5

How can the capacity for shared leadership be developed in staff members?

A staff that has the capacity and willingness to share leadership is crucial in the process of implementing school reform. "My single most important role is as a developer of human potential. I look for strengths in individuals and build upon them. In the process, new leaders constantly emerge," says Trousdale of her staff at Ysleta Middle School in El Paso. There are several things a principal can do within the parameters of the current school situation to increase leadership capacity among staff members.

1. Work with the district to ensure that hiring policies and interviews emphasize leadership skills when hiring new staff. This approach can include simulations of problem-solving activities, review of personal experience in leadership roles, and a clear statement of job expectations.
2. Work to assess the leadership capacity of the present staff by using surveys, such as Linda Lambert's (1998) "Leadership Capacity Staff Survey." While it is important to encourage everyone to assume leadership roles at some point, there needs to be flexibility for staff to place a higher priority on their other commitments, if necessary.
3. Build capacity among your current staff by providing professional development focused on leadership skills and encouraging networking within and beyond the school. "Our district faced a real lack of staff development at first, and we've written grants with money set aside specifically to *make sure* they [teachers] have the training they need," says Kathy Anderson, discussing how the funding Tom Elementary receives is allocated. Trousdale also sees training for incoming teachers, students, and parents as a way to provide a strong basis for developing leadership capacity in those new to the school community.

Students in Fabens, Texas, are active participants in the school district's Collaborative Action Team (CAT). The CAT process is one that helps build leadership capacity in the district, drawing parents, students, teachers, and community members into the decisionmaking process.

"My single most important role is as a developer of human potential. I look for strengths in individuals and build upon them. In the process, new leaders constantly emerge," says Trousdale of her staff at Ysleta Middle School in El Paso.

"Teachers in need of assistance and teachers new to the campus receive a great deal of attention through scheduled formal and informal conferences in which goals and objectives are developed together."

How can leadership be shared with students, parents, and community members?

Shared leadership should also extend beyond the school walls. Parents, students, and community members provide important perspectives, particularly in discussing major school initiatives. They can also offer unique and valuable technical assistance, expanding the resources and pool of knowledge available to the school. Relationships within this diverse "community of leaders" must be nurtured through respectful dialogue and shared responsibility. Jackie Morgan, the principal of Lee Elementary in El Paso, Texas, invites business and community representatives and parents to participate in making decisions as part of the Campus Improvement Team and tracks the needs of students' families using surveys. Trousdale sees the parents of the students as particularly significant to the success of her school. "We have an active, involved group of parents who work and train along with staff members. We believe that our parents are the experts, for who knows more about their children than they do?" Both communication and information play important roles in building trust and nurturing relationships among all the stakeholders of a reform program.

What are some specific resources, skills, and strategies for sharing leadership?

Information is a source of power. With access to high-quality information about topics related to school reform, teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members can make decisions based on knowledge instead of emotion. Valuable information can be obtained by studying research materials, searching the Internet, visiting other schools with similar challenges, attending trainings and conferences, and networking. At Ysleta Middle School, Trousdale builds the knowledge base of parents as well as that of the staff by sending representatives of both to professional development sessions and conferences.

Another type of information that can be very powerful is a principal's understanding of the internal workings of a school. Anderson discusses the importance of keeping a finger on the pulse of the school's climate: "Since we are such a small school, I can work on

a much more personal level with my teachers. It's crucial for me to know what's going on with the students and the teachers." In larger schools, principals may need to enlist the help of their staff in maintaining that personal connection. Taking "the pulse" of a school involves continuously looking at: the interpersonal dynamics of the staff, the history of the school and of the people in the surrounding community, the fundamental beliefs and assumptions of those at the school, the student achievement data, and other demographics. An understanding of each of these areas is important in making decisions related to a school's reform effort.

Systems, skills, and strategies for effective communication are perhaps the most important part of building leadership capacity within a school. Lambert (1998) believes that inquiry, reflection, skillful dialogue, and problem-solving actions are all vital aspects of the communication process. Communication can take place in a variety of settings: faculty and community meetings, smaller group meetings, and one-on-one conversations. Melson encourages communication with her staff. "Openly discussing ideas and recognizing disagreements allows us to get the issues on the table and not waste time." Often, in the initial stages of building leadership capacity, people who are unused to taking the lead may continue to look to the principal for permission, criticism, praise, guidance, and/or information. A principal can use several communication techniques to encourage shared leadership (adapted from Lambert, p. 25):

1. Throw questions back at the teachers, such as "What do you think?" or "Can you help me flesh out this idea?"
2. Use silence to let other opinions surface.
3. Offer ranges of possibilities, avoiding simplistic answers.
4. Restate the vision frequently to ensure its impact on decisions.
5. Phrase concerns as questions—avoid pointing a finger of blame.
6. Admit you're wrong with grace, candor, and humility.

Building shared leadership is, like school reform itself, a time-intensive process. All of these principals have enjoyed watching their teachers build leadership capacity. As Barbara Trousdale puts it, "My reward is watching others apply these new-found skills with confidence and success, and in the process, my own work load is lessened."

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RESOURCES

For more information on shared leadership, check out some of these resources.

An on-line directory of numerous leadership and training programs can be found at **http://www.ieLorg/leader/directory.html**

Thomas J. Sergiovanni's book, ***Leadership for the Schoolhouse,*** published in 1996 by Jossey-Bass, provides educators with a leadership model that is based on a democratic approach to education and what we know about how students learn and develop. For more information, go to **http://www.JosseyBass.com/catalog/isbn/0-7879-0119-9/**

Building Leadership Capacity in Schools, by Linda Lambert (published in 1998 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) has many practical, hands-on tools and tips for sharing leadership, including a **"Leadership Capacity Staff Survey."** For more information, visit the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) on-line store at **http://www.ascd.org/**. Samples from the book can be downloaded.

Michael Fullan's article **"Breaking the Bonds of Dependency,"** in the April 1998 issue of *Educational Leadership,* can also found at: **http://www.pa.ash.org.au/pecnsw/Leadership_-_Fullan.html**

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Mean Comparisons for Regional Analysis of CSRD *Early Implementation Survey*

Regional analysis for selected survey items of the CSRD *Early Implementation Survey* indicated that the respondents generally perceived things were going well with the implementation of the CSRD program. The mean ratings indicate that teachers, principals, and parents across the SEDL region agree that the CSRD program is being implemented successfully in the areas of *Leadership and Professional Development*. Other factors for which data were analyzed include *Stakeholder Involvement, Policies, Communication, Materials and Equipment, Program Support, Student Progress,* and *Context for Change*. Data have been analyzed for the individual CSRD schools, for the five states in our region, and for the region as a whole. For further information on the survey results, please contact SEDL's CSRD staff at (800) 476-6861.

Selected Survey Items	**Fall '99 Survey** Number of total respondents was 4,763	**Spring '00 Survey** Number of total respondents was 4,630
Leadership		
The primary leader...		
• sets a positive tone for change.	3.35	3.32
• promotes the vision for my school's CSRD program.	3.38	3.36
• ensures that technical assistance is being provided.	3.28	3.29
• attends professional development activities with teachers.	3.39	3.36
Professional Development		
The majority of professional development activities related to my school's CSRD program...		
• are relevant to the program being implemented.	3.25	3.25
• are guided by the school's vision.	3.28	3.27
• are conducted by highly competent person(s).	3.24	3.22
• include sufficient training for the use of CSRD-related materials and equipment.	2.95	2.97

Note. Values represent mean ratings from 1 to 4, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

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